Diversity management practices in the hospitality sector in Zimbabwe: The role of HR

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ABSTRACT

Diversity management has been hype as the latest fad to occupy management discourse today. This shift to diversity management has been necessitated by the move away from the traditional labour intensive organisations to the modern globalised industries which rely on a diverse array of workers to meet organizational objectives. It is against this background that this study was conducted to identify the diversity management practices in the hospitality sector in Zimbabwe. The study employed a descriptive survey design within the qualitative research paradigm to solicit for the research data. Purposive sampling was used to select the study respondents from hotels across Zimbabwe. The study revealed that HR managers in the hospitality sector in Zimbabwe are practicing a number of strategies to deal with issues of diversity in the hotel industry. These include the use of policies to guide diversity appreciation, building a diverse sensitive culture, and training employees amongst other strategies. It was recommended that players in the hospitality industry should adopt diversity management as a strategic objective to effectively harness its merits.

Key words: Employee diversity, hospitality sector, Zimbabwe.

INTRODUCTION

Diversity management refers to the voluntary organizational actions that are designed to create greater inclusion of employees from various backgrounds into the formal and informal organizational structures through deliberate policies and programs (Cox, 1999). Diversity management recognizes that there are differences among employees and these differences if properly managed will enable work to be done more efficiently and effectively (Armstrong, 2009). It does not focus exclusively on issues to do with discrimination, but instead concentrates on recognizing differences between and among people at the workplace. Kandola and Fullerton (1994) express the concept of managing diversity as founded on the premise that harnessing the differences in people at the workplace will create an environment in which everyone will feel valued, where their talents are fully utilized and in which organizations goals are met. As Agócs and Burr, (1996), concurs and argues, that valuing of diverse perspectives throughout the organization will foster system flexibility, as the organization will become more fluid, more flexible and more responsive to environmental changes.

As Collins (2006) and Fernandez (1991) notes, diversity management is a perpetual process, with an ambitious goal: the creation of an organizational culture where the best people want to work, where everyone is treated with dignity and respect, where people are promoted on their merits and where opportunities for success are available to all. Benschop (2001) concurs and argues that embedding the principles of diversity management in every organisational activity can be a stepping stone in ensuring that organisations achieve their most ambitious business goals. In other words diversity management is ultimately about unleashing the rich and diverse potential of an entire workforce by facilitating the exchange of new perspectives, improving problem solving by inviting different ideas, and creating a respectful, acceptable work environment (Kandola and Fullerton, 1994). Bassett-Jones (2005) concurs and concludes that the key for employers is to
make diversity an asset within the organization.

Diversity management presents a more contemporary comprehensive approach to the management of human resources today (Ely and Thomas, 2001; Alcazer et al., 2013; Gröschl and Doherty, 1999). However the challenges for many Human Resource (HR) practitioners is to link diversity objectives to HR strategies that are widely valued for organizational effectiveness (Fleury, 1999). In addition, Kossek and Lobel (1996) argues that HR departments can also accrue benefits which include improved attitudes of members towards others who are different leading to increased productivity and group cohesiveness, cost effectiveness through reduced lawsuits. In addition, if an organization employ people of diverse backgrounds, this leads to increased market share, sales and enhanced capability to enter new markets through the multicultural experiences of its members (Tisserant, 2013). Likewise, an organization with diversity management strategies in place has got an enhanced reputation thereby making it an employer of choice thus improving and widening its recruitment pool (Groeneveld, 2011; Boerner, 2011).

Winfield, Bishop and Porter (2000) note that managing diversity is a strategy that accepts that the workforce consists of a diverse population and this diversity should be used to meet organizational objectives. An organization following a policy of managing diversity will put less emphasis on fulfilling legal requirements and taking steps to redress imbalances of opportunity rather it will take into account the less obvious differences between and among people. As put across by Groeneveld (2010) and Pitts and Wise (2010), inequality in the workplace particularly affects the following people, women, minority groups, the disabled and the aged. Older members of the workforce are discriminated against in that they are often targeted in redundancy programmes and some organization prefers recruiting younger workers (ageism). Likewise, employees with disabilities are often discriminated as a result of many organizations equating disability with inability (Nel, 2009). Diversity awareness programs have been developed to change such attitudes and stereotypes and improving the progress and satisfaction of woman and other minority groups (Bassett-Jones, 2005; Robinson, 2007; Boerner, 2011).

In practice, as asserted by Kundu (2003), diversity management involves both compulsory and voluntary management actions. There are laws requiring that employers minimize discrimination at work such as the Zimbabwean Labour Act. However, as noted by Cox (2001), while such compulsory actions may reduce the more blatant diversity barriers, blending a diverse workforce into a close-knit and thriving community also requires voluntary steps. Such voluntary steps include providing strong leadership, assessing the current attitudes and perceptions towards different cultural groups within the organization, providing strong diversity training and education, changing culture and management systems, for instance, changing appraisal criteria to measure supervisors performance based partly on their success to solve intergroup conflicts and evaluating management diversity programs (Cox, 2001; Kreitner and Kinicki, 2010; Richard et al., 2004).

Of late the notion of diversity has come to the fore and Cascio (2001) provides an explanation as to why diversity has evolved to be a dominant activity in managing an organization’s human resources. In his explanation Cascio (2001) identified a number of reasons to explain this trend and the reasons are as follows:

1) There has been a significant shift from manufacturing to a service provision in the economy and service industry jobs such as banking and tourism imply lots of interaction with customer. There is need therefore for service employees to be able to understand their customers, to anticipate and monitor and their expectations and to be able to able to respond sensitively and appropriately to these needs and expectations. Thus having a workforce that is more representative of the customers creates more effective interactions between the customers and the service providers. This mirroring maybe in terms of culture or language and it helps in enhancing customer relations.

2) As organizations around the world compete for customers they offer choices unavailable to them domestically and to satisfy customers needs firms have to get closer to their customers. Diversity must therefore be managed by working through domestic diversity or merging national as well as corporate cultures to ensure that the organization is able to reach a more broad and diverse customer or clientele base.

3) Firms have discovered that it is through team work that that they are able to execute newly adopted strategies stressing better quality, innovation, cost control or speed. Team working promote greater flexibility, reduced operating costs, faster response to technological change, job classifications and better response to newer worker values such as increased autonomy and discretion among workers.

4) Managers who have worked out the results of mergers, acquisitions and strategic international alliances know how important it is to knit together the new partners in financial, technological, production, and marketing resources. It is important to note that enterprise resources include people and this means creating a partnership spans different corporate cultures. Organizations should therefore be able to bring the differences in the values, norms, and ways of doing business that is brought in by the two cultures through diversity management lest the employees experience a cultural shock in which they do not know which culture to follow.

5) The workforce will be characterized by more diversity in every respect and the step in attaining the advantages of diversity is to teach all employees to understand and value different races, ethnic groups, cultures, languages, sexual
The arguments above prove that a diversified staff provides the company with a competitive advantage through catering for an increasing diverse customer base. Whereas in the past diversity management was adopted by companies in order to conform to anti-discrimination laws, these days, the practice has since become a source of competitive advantage.

Whilst organizations are able to tap the benefits that accrue to organizations with a diverse workforce, in the process they also encounter various challenges associated with having workers drawn from diverse social groups (Bunderson and Sutcliffe, 2002; Lovelace et al., 2001). Bernardin (2007) agrees and asserts that, contrary to the common assumption increased diversity does not necessarily improve the talent pool, neither does it necessarily build commitment nor improve motivation, the benefits may only be realized when it is managed effectively. This argument is again bolstered by Winfield, Bishop and Porter (2010) who argue that the benefits of diversity in organizations can only be realized when employees identify more with their workgroups than the diverse social groups they are drawn from.

The Zimbabwean workforce like any other labour force in this globalised world is generally diverse (Chiboiwa et al., 2010; Chadya and Mayavo, 2002; Mukono, 2004). This stems to some extent from the colonial labour recruitment strategies employed in colonial Rhodesia (Duncan, 1973; Chadya and Mayavo, 2002). The early colonial employers in Rhodesia resorted to migrant labour from Northern Rhodesia, Nyasaland and Mozambique. In addition, the indigenous people were in themselves diverse coming from the different dialects that make the major tribes in Zimbabwe, the Shona and the Ndebele (Mayavo, 2000; Van Onslen, 1976). The resultant diversity in the Zimbabwean labour market as captured by Chadya and Mayavo (2002) manifests itself through a myriad of ways which includes age, ethnicity, nationality, sex, education and religious affiliation, ethnicity, and linguistics. It is with these differences in mind that the researcher was motivated to investigate the strategies that are put in place by HR managers to ensure that players in the hospitality sector can draw benefits from this diversity.

Statement of the problem

The interest to investigate the effectiveness of diversity management strategies in the hospitality sector in Zimbabwe stems from the fact that the world’s increasing globalization requires more interaction among people from different cultures, beliefs, backgrounds than ever before. People no longer live and work in an insular market places, they are now part of a worldwide economy with competition coming from every corner of the continent (Bernadin, 2007; Robinson, 2007; Boerner, 2011). This globalization has brought about many challenges amongst them how to manage a culturally diverse workforce. Diversity is therefore an increasingly important factor in the working life as hospitality organizations worldwide become more diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, nationality, and other personal characters of their members. The interest also stems from the fact that the ushering in of anti-discriminatory legislation through the Labour Act in the case of Zimbabwe has seen a shift in employment patterns at the workplace as the prohibition of discrimination at the workplace on the basis of sex, race, nationality, tribe, pregnancy, HIV/AIDS status, disability, creed, political opinion and place of origin has seen the workforce being increasingly diverse. Thus organizations should put in place strategies that ensure that they are able to tap the benefits of such diversity.

Objectives of the study

In this study the researcher seeks to:

1. To identify the diversity management practices in the Tourism and Hospitality sector.
2. To determine the employees perception of the diversity management strategies in place.
3. To explore the challenges posed by diversity management.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Of late, Human Resource practitioners have recognized the need to adopt effective diversity management practices in order to overcome barriers of diversity and reap the rewards of creating a diverse workforce (Barrows, 1990; Boone and Hendriks, 2009). Kossek and Lobel (1996) summarize four prevailing HR approaches to diversity management and attempt to trace the link between human resource management practices, workforce diversity, and the achievement of organizational objectives. The four approaches are;

Diversity enlargement

Approach focuses on increasing the representation of individuals of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds in the organization. The goal is to change the organizational culture by changing the demographic composition of the workforce. Often at times this approach is motivated by the need to abide by legal requirements rather than an understanding of the business need for diversity.

Diversity sensitivity

This approach attempts to achieve workforce diversity through diversity training aimed at sensitizing employees.
to the need for workforce diversity. The major premise of this approach is that increased sensitivity to diversity will lead to improved performance. Although this is sometimes the case, in other instances, it can create more harm than good. Emphasizing differences can backfire by reinforcing stereotypes and highlighting intergroup differences rather than improving communication through understanding and common interests.

**Cultural audit**

This approach aims at identifying the obstacles that limit the progress of employees from diverse backgrounds and that block collaboration among different cultural groups in the organization. The audit is usually performed by consultants who identify areas in which employees who are different from the dominant group feel that they are blocked from performing to the best of their ability.

**Strategy for achieving organizational outcomes**

Using this strategy, managers have to identify the link between diversity management objectives and desired individual and organizational outcomes. Organizational strategic choices are viewed in the context of environmental drivers such as the changing labor market composition, the global economy, the shift to a service economy, and the legal and governmental pressures. Analyzing environmental drivers can help the organization determine the specific benefits it expects to gain from its diversity management and how those are linked to its overall business strategy.

The sum total of this diversity management mix should provide the ideal organization that Cox (1999) termed “the multicultural organization”. The multicultural organization is characterized by a culture that fosters and values cultural difference and equally incorporates all members of the organization via pluralism as an acculturation process, rather than as an end resulting in assimilation. The multicultural organization has full integration, structurally and informally, is free of any bias and favoritism toward one group as compared with others, and has only a minimal intergroup conflict, thanks to effective management of diversity.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Diversity was acknowledged to be an inherent characteristic of workforces in all the hotels in the study. A general perception of the findings reveals that diversity in the hospitality sector in Zimbabwe manifests itself in a number of forms. These include religion, marital status, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, nationality, and language. This conforms to the diversity enlargement solution to diversity management as postulated by Kossek and Lobel (1996). Linguistic diversity is particularly important in the hospitality sector as according to Kirton and Greene (1999) it aids in attracting a wide customer base. This is particularly important in the hospitality industry where the customer base is drawn from across the whole world (Christensen, 1993; Elmuti, 1993; Mukono, 2004).

All the respondents concurred that they practice diversity management in their organizations. That is despite the fact that none of the organizations studied has got a comprehensive diversity management policy which outlines the organisations’ goals on diversity, its long-term and short-term diversity strategy, and initiatives for all employees and managers as suggested by Alcazar et al (2013). The respondents revealed that they resort to piecemeal policies to address organizational diversity and to the provisions of the Labour Act. For example, with regard to gender, the respondents unanimously pointed out that they were required by Zimbabwean legislation to provide equal opportunities for both women and men. However 75% of the respondents indicated that they have some affirmative action policies in place aiming at advancing the careers of women in their hotels.

The hospitality industry across the globe continues to face serious challenges in attracting and retaining employees (Barrows, 1990; Ghiselli et al., 2001; Chiang et al., 2005). Any strategy that bears the potential of lessening this problem should be taken aboard; and if diversity management is one such strategy, then the hospitality industry in Zimbabwe should certainly treat it with the seriousness that it deserves. The findings of the study indicate that the hospitality sector in Zimbabwe generally follows the principle of equal opportunity with regard to its hiring and promotion procedures and do not discriminate on the basis of gender, sex religion affiliation, and creed.

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The study employed a descriptive survey design within the qualitative research paradigm. The design was employed to gather the opinions and perceptions of HR managers on the diversity management practices in use in the Zimbabwean hospitality sector.

A questionnaire was designed purposively targeting HR managers in 20 three to five star hotels from a list provided by the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority. The questionnaire solicited demographic information of respondents such as age, level of education and qualifications and views of respondents on the diversity management strategies currently in place in the hospitality sector. Data were coded and categorised using the Miles and Huberman (1994) method of data analysis. Major themes identified in the data revolved around the five set objectives.
with respect to employment decisions and other conditions of work such as pay or benefits. The research identified a number of equal opportunity employment practices being implemented in the industry;

i) Equal and fair recruitment policies.
ii) Equal pay for equal work
iii) Fair and transparent promotion policies

The use of these policies ensures that the recruitment and selection function in the industry is diversity conscious. However, there was glaring lack of female representation in top level positions. This indicates a flaw in the diversity management practices currently prevailing in the industry.

Diversity management experts, argue that managing diversity strategies should fit with and be carried by the vision, mission and values of the firm (Kossek and Lobel, 1996; Fleury, 1999). As such organizations fully embracing diversity management should reflect this in their visions, missions and core values. Only 10% of the respondents in organizations indicated that they have diversity inclusion as part of their core values. This point to the low level of attention diversity management is given in the hospitality industry. On the same note, the findings of the research also revealed that diversity management is been enforced through quasi-legal policies that cuts across the industry. The hospitality industry in Zimbabwe is making use of an industry-wide code of conduct that governs behaviour at the workplace. The code of conduct explicitly states appropriate and expected behaviours at the workplace. The code which draws its provisions from the Labour Act makes it an offence to amongst other things discriminate on the basis of "race, colour, creed, ethnicity, religious and affiliation."

The researcher discovered that almost all (80%) employees in the industry wear uniforms as a method of standardizing dress. The researcher established that the use of uniforms is a diversity management initiative put across by the HR department to address the social background of employees. Employees are drawn from various social backgrounds in terms of economic status and as such the provision of uniforms brings uniformity among the employees as their economic status would have been masked by the uniforms. The provision of uniform prevents a situation whereby those who can afford come to work 'dressed to kill' in clothes that reflect an affluent life which could make those who cannot afford such clothes feel left out and withdraw from others as one responded puts it across, "uniforms makes us similar, rich or poor."

According to (Thompson, 1996; Florkowski, 1996; Cannella, 2008) team work is one best method of managing employee diversity as it fosters shared values, group cohesiveness and the common good of the organisation. All the respondents pointed to the factor that they make use teamwork to build employee cohesiveness and diversity tolerance. According to one particular responded the teams are carefully selected to include as diverse a people as possible to cater for the different and varied interests of the customer base in hotels as demanded by Kirton and Greene (1999).

Fleury (1999) suggested that diverse sensitive companies should invest in internal communication projects, with the purpose of disclosing the diversity program objectives to all employees. 85% of the respondents revealed that they have a clear and effective communication system, and channels used to disseminate information to employees about diversity awareness issues. Employees are also given the platform to express the challenges that they encounter in their work and possible solutions are suggested during periodic meetings. 70% employees interviewed agreed that the communication process in the organization is effective and that management makes an effort to communicate with the employees and provide feedback on how they are performing.

Periodic training programs, in organizations assist employees to become more aware of the invisible diversity barriers in the organization (Dovidio, 2005; King et al., 2012; Dobin, 2009) These authorities concur that diversity sensitivity training is important in sensitizing employees to stereotyping and discrimination while also promoting communication collaboration and in the end improve organizational performance. Sadly the research revealed that there is virtually no diversity awareness training programmes across the whole industry. The respondents justified this sad state of affairs by blaming it on the top management philosophy which does not see much credence in "any training outside the mainstream business of the organisation" as one respondent phrased it.

The research established a number of challenges that result from the presence of a diverse workforce. These includes difficulties in team working brought about by differences in ideas and frames of reference; differences in language that often lead to poor communication and misunderstanding thereby fuelling unnecessary and interpersonal conflicts. Segmentation also on the basis of ethnicity and place of origin was also highlighted to be one of the challenges of diversity as individual from the same place or ethnic group formed some sort of secluded society leading to difficulties in accommodating others. This is in line with the social categorization theory (Mullins, 2008) which states that employees form ‘in-groups’ on the basis of similarity. This does not only pose problems to the employees concerned but management also conceded that this posses to be a challenges as members of such ‘groups’ are connected and cover up for each other such that they may even distort the truth especially in cases relating to theft in the organization.

More so another challenge was also highlighted to be between the aged and less qualified workers and the young and just graduated members of the workforce. The aged and less qualified but more experienced workers feel that they are considered to be the inferior group as they don’t
have degrees or diplomas. There is tension driven by cultural dictates which frown upon people in different age groups working together and the threat to their job security with their degrees whilst the younger workers from tertiary institutes think that “they know it all” and consider the older colleagues as rigid and outdated. This also has a crippling effect on team working as the two groups of employees become antagonistic towards each other in a bid to prove their ‘worthy’ to the other party.

SURVEY ANALYSIS

The findings of the this survey are in line with the study conducted by Alacar et al (1994) whose study entitled “Workforce diversity in strategic human resource management models: A critical review of the literature and implications for future research” concluded that managing a heterogeneous workforce requires a holistic transformation of human resource strategies to effectively tap into the benefits of workforce heterogeneity.

Similar findings were also made by Moore, Parkhouse and Konrad (2004) whose study on diversity management in sport management revealed that diversity management was essential in drawing into the frontline marginalized groups in the society.

Closer to Zimbabwe, Mkono did a survey in (2010) entitled “In defense of hospitality careers: perspectives of Zimbabwean hotel managers”. The survey findings revealed that Zimbabwe’s hospitality industry has got a diverse workforce which if effectively managed can bring good returns.

An almost similar survey was also conducted by Fleury (1999) in Brazil a country with an almost similar economic setting as Zimbabwe. The survey entitled “The management of cultural diversity: Lessons from Brazilian companies” revealed that in a heterogeneous society like Brazil, workforce diversity management is inevitable. The same can also be said about Zimbabwe’s hospitality sector as supported by the findings of this study.

Conclusion

The goal of this study was to analyse hotel HR perspectives on workforce diversity and DM practices in Zimbabwe’s hotel industry. It is clear from the findings that the industry still has a long way to go before diversity is fully embraced in the hospitality sector in Zimbabwe. The industry has not progressed from an equal opportunity approach to embracing and valuing diversity. The hotel industry in Zimbabwe can reap significant rewards from the increased capacity for creativity and innovation that it certainly requires in meeting the needs of diverse customers.

The whole industry could make significant strides in diversity management if it incorporated diversity management into the overally business strategy of the hotels. The hotel industry should treat diversity and inclusivity as some of its core values so that it becomes the lever that drives the business strategy as suggested by Kirton and Greene (1999), Merian (1988), Barber and Daly (1996), McCain (1996) and others. HR managers would then with other line management functions formulate and implement diversity conscious policies.

Findings indicate that the current approach is very much reactive as opposed to been proactive. In Zimbabwe, the primary concern of hotel companies with regard to diversity is demonstrating a non-discriminatory policy as required by the Labour Act. Human resources departments are urged to understand what is best for the organization based on teamwork and the dynamics of the workplace. According to Roosevelt (1990), Moyihan and Pandey (2008), Barber and Daly (1996) and McCain (1996) managing diversity is a comprehensive process for creating a work environment that includes everyone.

A total change of organisational culture is required from a ‘tolerance’ of diversity position to a culture where diversity is deliberately pursued. Further, they should aim to create a diversity-friendly environment in the organisation. This requires a systematic approach based on continuous training in an effort to shape the culture of the labour force into diversity tolerance and inclusivity. Therefore, hospitality industry need to develop, implement, and maintain ongoing training aimed at changing behaviours, shaping organisational culture and values towards diversity appreciation. A periodic cultural audit as suggested by Kossek and Lobel (1996) would also play a significant role in ensuring that HR managers can easily identify barriers to cultural inclusivity and make changes in time.

Managers must also understand that fairness is not necessarily equality. Managing diversity is about more than equal employment opportunity and affirmative action. Managers should expect change to be slow, while at the same time encouraging change. Another vital requirement when dealing with diversity is promoting a “safe” place for employees to communicate (Daley, 2006). Social gatherings and business meetings, where every member must listen and have the chance to speak, are good ways to create dialogues. The industry should implement policies such as mentoring programs to provide employees access to information and opportunities. Also, employees should never be denied necessary, constructive, critical feedback for learning about mistakes and successes (Ibid).

REFERENCES


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